

① 2
The mutual Obligations of the Christian Clergy
and Laity to Holiness of Life.

A
S E R M O N

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY
UNITARIAN COLLECTION

Preached at the

PARISH-CHURCH

O F

BLACKBURN, Lancashire,

JULY 22, 1742.

A T T H E

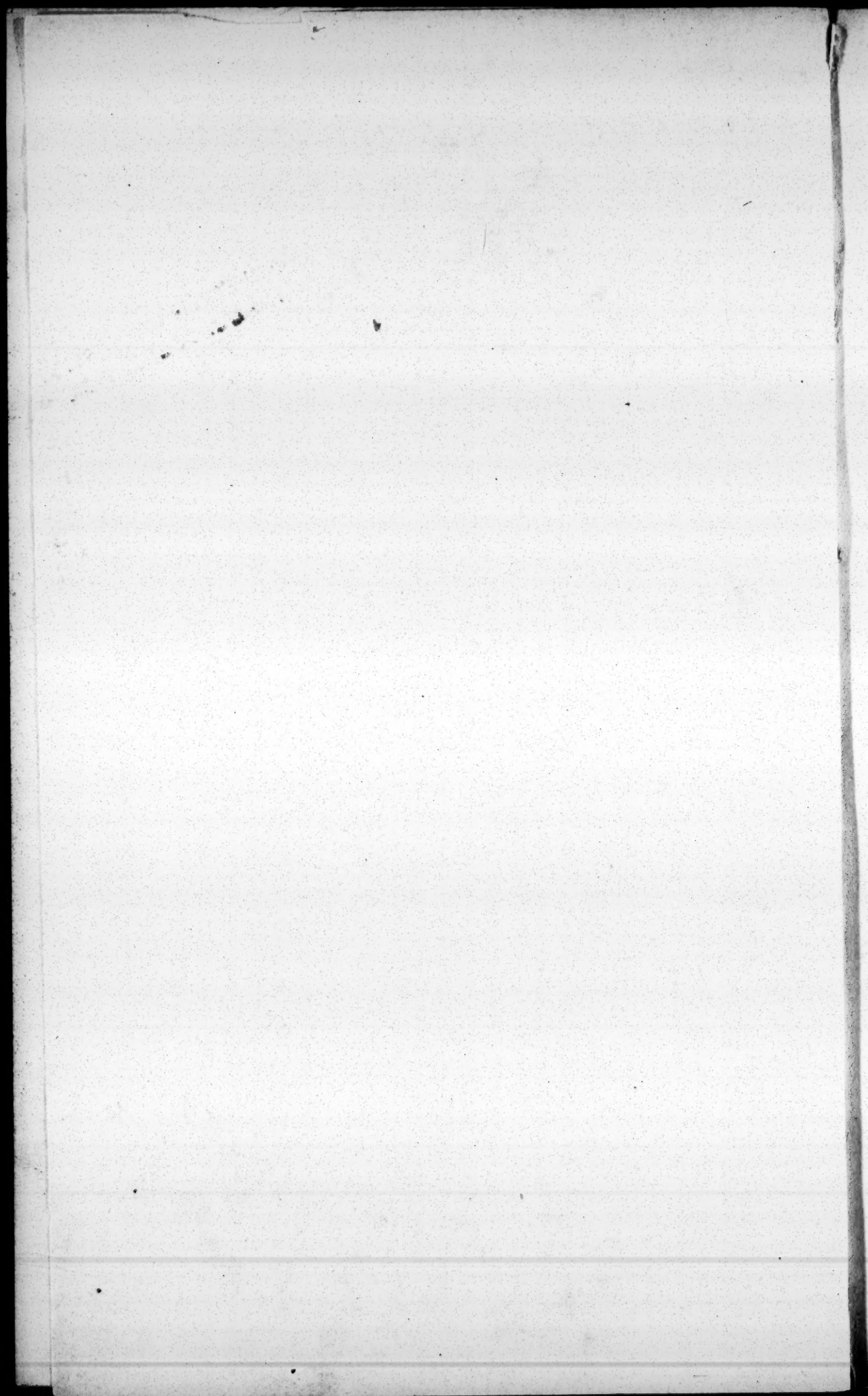
Triennial VISITATION of the Right
Reverend Father in God, *SAMUEL*,
Lord Bishop of *Chester*.

By *EDWARD SHAKESPEAR*, M. A.
Rector of *North-Meals*, and Vicar of *Leyland*, in
Lancashire.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. CLARKE, at the *Golden Ball* in *Duck-Lane*;
and sold by J. ROBERTS in *Warwick-Lane*; and
J. HOPKINS, Bookfeller, in *Preston*. 1742.

[Price Six-pence.]



TO THE

Right Reverend Father in GOD,

SAMUEL,

Lord Bishop of *Chester*.

My LORD,

I Preached the following SERMON
by your Command, and you
was pleased, more than once, to
order me to print it. I have obeyed
your LORDSHIP in this also; and
sincerely wish the Publication may
answer the principal Aim and Intent

A 2

of

19

DEDICATION.

of it; the Promotion, my LORD,
of real and unaffected Piety and
Virtue among all who profess and
call themselves Christians. I am,

My LORD,

YOUR LORDSHIP'S

Most dutiful humble Servant,

E. SHAKESPEAR.

2 TIM. ii. 19.

*Let every one that nameth the Name
of Christ depart from Iniquity.*

TIS hard to say, whether there be greater Wickedness, or Weakness, in maintaining that the Christian Religion is a Divine Institution, which sets Men free from all Obligations to moral Duties. But early, it should seem, were such Opinions entertained by some Men, built probably upon the Doctrines of the Apostles themselves, and the first Teachers of it. St. *James*, we find, calls the Gospel *the perfect Law of Liberty*; and St. *Paul* exhorts Christians to stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Jesus Christ had made them free. From such Expressions as these, innocently mistaken by some, or perversely interpreted by others, a wild Notion arose in many, that, as Christians, they neither were, nor could be subject to the civil Magistrate, nor Servants to any Master: And hence we hear *Paul*
and

and *Peter* earnestly opposing this Error, by often reminding Servants of the Duty they owed to their Masters, and by directing all Christians in general to pay all dutiful Obedience to the Powers in being, and not to use their Liberty as a Cloak of Maliciousness.

OTHERS, in later Ages, carried this Notion farther, and contended for a general Liberty to neglect all Kinds of moral Duties. The Gospel, they thought, was the free Grace of God, offering Salvation to all Men without any Conditions on our Part; without requiring any moral Qualifications in us to make us worthy of the Divine Favour, or fit to be Partakers of the spiritual Happiness promised by Christianity.

THE strict Observance of Morality is the Source and Support of all the Happiness we can hope to enjoy at present, and a necessary Condition of obtaining that which we expect hereafter. No Wonder therefore, while such Opinions prevailed, and Practices suitable to them, if the Name of God was blasphemed in the World.

NOT in these Respects, doubtless, was Christianity called the Doctrine or Law of Liberty; tho', upon other Accounts, it highly deserved the Title: As it freed the *Jews* from that Yoke of Ceremonies which was almost intolerably heavy; and as it
freed

freed all, both *Jew* and *Gentile*, from the still heavier Yoke of a vicious and debauched Life and Conversation.

FOR there is nothing more true than the Stoical Paradox, That every wicked Man is a Slave. And, agreeably to this excellent Apothegm, our Saviour tells us, *Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free*; and St. *Paul*, in several Passages, chuses to represent a State of Sin as a State of Slavery. And, surely, with the greatest Propriety and Justice imaginable. For Vice is the hardest Master in the World; its Demands are endless, and its Desires insatiable. So that he who undertakes to serve Sin, can never finish his Work. And this Servitude has one peculiar Aggravation, that a Man can never escape from it, or the Hardships attending it; because every wicked Man is a Slave to himself, and his own Tormentor.

God be thanked, the foolish Opinions of Christianity, I have mentioned, are now vanished and gone. Few or none advance or defend them in Books or Conversation. But yet one cannot but think, tho' these Extravagancies are not openly supported, that the poisonous Principle still lurks and exerts itself in the Hearts of Men. For however orthodox the Generality of Christians may be in their Opinions and Tenets,
it

it must be owned, to our Shame and Confusion, that their Lives are heretical; and that a bad Life is the worst Heresy in Religion. The Conduct of most Christians is so visibly unsuitable to the Rules of their Profession, that it makes it necessary for the Ministers of the Gospel to treat Men as Babes, to feed them with Milk instead of strong Meat, and often to inculcate, often to remind them of the plainest, the first and fundamental Principles of their Religion; even to tell them, and formally to prove to them, that it is the Duty of *every one that nameth the Name of Christ to depart from Iniquity.*

To this Task my Subject would now lead me, and I could gladly discharge it. But as I stand before a mix'd Audience of Clergy and Laity, I may be thought to speak more pertinent to this Occasion, if,

First, I apply, in a particular Manner, the Christian Obligation of departing from Iniquity to that Order of Men to which I have the Honour and Happiness to belong.

AND, *Secondly*, endeavour to expose and remove a Prejudice in the Minds of the Laity; which not only affects our own Characters, but seems to have fatal Influences upon Christianity itself.

First,

First, I shall apply, in a particular Manner, the Christian Obligation of departing from Iniquity to that Order of Men to which I have the Honour and Happiness to belong.

I SAY Honour, not only upon account of our near Relation to Christ our Head, (tho' in this we may, and ought chiefly to rejoice) but because no Christian Church, since the glorious Day of our Reformation, hath produced more Men of distinguished Piety and Learning, and all Accomplishments which can adorn our Profession, and make us acceptable Servants to God and Man, than ours hath. The Clergy of this Church have not only been equal to others in all Parts of sacred Learning, as eminent and useful Expositors of the holy Volumes, and as powerful Preachers of sound Doctrine; but few are the Branches of polite Literature in general which they have not touched upon, and in which they have not excelled; and, indeed, which are not indebted, for many of their Improvements, to their Care and Cultivation. So that if the Merits and Titles of Ancestors are allowed, in common Esteem, to derive Honour and Lustre upon their Descendants, and even an undeserving Posterity, why shall not the Lives and Labours of our spi-

B
ritual

ritual Forefathers be admitted to reflect a few Rays of Glory upon us who follow them in the same Work of the Ministry? And why have not we Reason to boast and rejoice, that we are Clergymen of the Church of *England*?

AND I esteem it a Happiness to be a Member of this Body, because the several Duties of the pastoral Function cannot but be a happy and desirable Employment to a good Man; as it consists in doing Good to all Men by all the charitable Offices imaginable; by comforting the Sick, instructing the Ignorant, reforming the Vicious, and encouraging the Good; by administering the Bread of Life, and the Baptism of Repentance, and committing the Dead to the Dust from which they were taken. So that if the World were disposed to compliment us, it might be said, *Blessed be ye of the Lord for your Kindnesses to the Dead and to the Living.*

BUT whatever others may think of us; base and contemptible is the Man who is ashamed of such a Relation, or such an Employment: And baser still, if he is not animated by these Considerations to adorn his Station by a punctual and conscientious Discharge of the several Duties which belong to it.

AND,

AND, among these, we cannot but acknowledge, that our Profession, as Christians, engages us, as strongly at least as it does others, to depart from Iniquity, and to live openly and visibly in the Practice of all those Lessons of Religion which we constantly teach and press upon other Men. If our Friends or our Enemies can justly charge and reproach us with a great Deficiency in Christian Duties, we can have little to say for ourselves; and nothing can belong to us but Confusion of Face and Silence, inferring Guilt. Certainly we can have no Pretensions to excuse ourselves from any one Duty which Christianity lays upon its Followers: The World is rather inclined to think, that we are under greater and higher Obligations than other Men.

BESIDES, it is necessary to remind Clergymen, that Holiness of Life is the only Thing which can create a real Reverence to their Characters. The World seldom reasons well, or judges a-right in any thing. It has been true from the Beginning of it, that Riches and Power claimed, and always had a Regard paid to them above what, abstractedly considered, they could ever possibly deserve: And Poverty and Distress, if they have sometimes the good Fortune to meet with Pity, were never yet allowed to be proper Candidates for Reverence and

Esteem. The high Stations and large Incomes of many Men serve, in some Sort, as an Excuse for their Vices: The World dares not at least openly treat their Characters with the Scorn they deserve. But few of us enjoy Advantages capable of raising Envy; many, I am sure, scarce enough to secure them from Contempt. So that in general, nothing but an unblameable Life and Conversation is left us to preserve our Credit and Authority among Men: And without some Share of these, many Parts of our Function must wholly lose their Use and Value.

A LIFE spent in Piety and Virtue will command some tolerable Degrees of Respect; but if we let go our Integrity, we quit our chief Support, and must fall and drop of Consequence. A Man that practises what he teaches, will, in his publick and private Instructions, be heard with Attention; and those few among us, who enjoy great worldly Advantages, may possibly upon account of them, be entitled to a little Dissimulation, and not hear the worst of themselves: But he who is destitute of this World's Good, and all spiritual Ornaments besides, will be sure to be filled plentifully with the scornful Reproofs of the Wealthy, and with the Despiteness of the Proud.

So

So strongly does not only Christianity, but a prudent and necessary Concern for our own Credit and Reputation, and the Honour of our Function engage us, my Brethren, to depart from Iniquity; and this, from those who, in high Stations, preside over the Church of Christ, down to those who serve in the meanest of its Offices.

I CANNOT but add here, what we all cannot but know, that the World at present is disposed to asperse our Characters at any Rate, with or without Reason. None of us escape Censure, even the most unexceptionable. We are attacked in a Body without Exemption; we are represented by the Enemies of our Religion as Hypocrites and Knaves by Profession, and as if we could not be otherwise. There is, it is certain, equal Malice, Injustice and Uncharitableness in this Charge; even allowing, that some among us (and where is the Wonder in so numerous a Body?) may unhappily have given Occasion for these hard Sayings. But, upon this and all other Accounts, we ought to shew the World, by our Lives, that these poisoned Shafts of our Enemies are only dipp'd in Gall and Malice; and that the Religion we profess is the Power of God unto Holiness; not only as it more strongly commands us, but effectually enables us to be better Men than
those

those who make us the ordinary Subject of their Scorn and Laughter.

It is now near a Century since this fashionable Humour has mightily prevailed in the Nation. And therefore I cannot but beg Leave (tho' I should wander a little from my Subject) to add a Word of Encouragement to you to go on to add to your Faith, and all other Christian Graces, Knowledge; that we may in all Things be able to adorn and defend the Doctrine of God, our Saviour. It has been attacked from all Quarters and by all Arts. Heaven and Earth hath been ransacked, Sea and Land compassed to furnish out a Set of paltry Objections against Christianity. So that all the Helps of human Learning have necessarily been called in to its Aid. And as all of us have enjoyed the Advantages of a liberal Education, let us continually pursue them, and make the valuable Remains of Antiquity, in all the learned Languages, the modern Discoveries in Nature, and the Lectures of Philosophy, Hand-maids to Religion. The Overflowings of Infidelity, and Vice, its genuine Offspring, are sufficient to make all good Men afraid, as they cannot but observe how the Infection spreads and taints even the Youth and Striplings of the Age. These are now often to be met with in Conversation. And tho' any Man
of

of common Sense may know, from their idle Conduct in our Places of publick Education, that they cannot be overburthened with Learning or deep Proficients in Reasoning; and from their Years, and want of Experience, that they cannot be supposed to understand what is good and fitting for human Society, or what not; yet even these have learned to break a rude and senseless Jest or two upon our holy Religion and its Teachers: Lessons which, no doubt, have been taught them by those who sit, with more Majesty, in the Seat of the Scorn, and read grave Lectures upon the Incredibility of the Gospel, and the Hypocrisy and Craftiness of those who preach it. When Things are come to this pass, it is high Time for us to bethink ourselves, and to be ready to give an Answer to every Man who asketh a Reason of the Hope that is in us.

It would not, I think, become my Age to pursue these Reflections farther, sensible that I came here rather to receive Instructions than to give them, and much better qualified for the former Duty than the latter. It lies more within my Province to embrace an Opportunity, which my Text naturally affords me, of exposing and removing, in the second Place, a Prejudice in the Minds of the Laity, which not only affects our own
Cha-

Characters, but seems to have fatal Influences upon Christianity itself.

THE Prejudice I mean, is, that the Generality of Men think us obliged more strongly and peculiarly, as Clergymen and the Teachers of Religion, to fulfil the Duties, and live up to the Rules of it, than they themselves are or can be. A false Step in the Conduct of a Clergyman is cried out upon as a Prodigy in Nature, and as if all her Operations were in a total Disorder. Nothing is suffered to be pleaded in Excuse for it; not even Repentance and Reformation to make a sufficient Atonement: When we fall, we fall, it seems, like apostate Angels, never to rise again. But as to the Laity, they apprehend themselves to be under no such strict Ties; at least, not equal Ties with us. Vice, in them, they think, is by far more excusable; as they do not pretend to teach, exhort and admonish Men, as we do. So that if they condescend to be religious, we, it should seem, are highly obliged to them; and if they live wickedly, it is nothing worse than what might be expected from them.

A MAN, who lives in the World, and sees and hears what passes in the ordinary Conversation of it, cannot but be aware, that there is such a Prejudice; and deeply
rooted

rooted too in the Minds of Men, and tenderly cherished and succoured by those who are Enemies to our Master and our Order. There is no Man can be more willing, than I am, to acknowledge our solemn Obligations to all the Duties of Christianity and a holy Life: But I could never apprehend the Force of any Reasons which would shew our Obligations to be so much greater than those of other Men, as the World supposes. And because I am here to encounter a common and favourite Prejudice, not much dwelt upon by others, and may be thought a Setter forth of strange Doctrine, I shall beg Leave to sift this Matter a little critically.

Now, I presume, as Christians, we cannot be supposed to be under greater Obligations, to live suitably to our Profession, than other Men. We are all in Baptism equally dedicated to the Service of God, and the Precepts of Christianity have a general Direction, and include all Men. And this is so true, that it would be no hard Task to shew, that all those Rules of Behaviour which are prescribed to Clergymen in the Epistles of *Paul* to *Timothy* and *Titus*, (so far as they do not relate to a particular Office in the Church) are in other Parts of Scripture prescribed to all Christians, and equally enforced upon them.

FROM whence then can our peculiar Obligations arise? It will be said immediately, from our superior Knowledge of our Duty. And here I will ingenuously own, that Knowledge does infer Obligations to act suitably to that Knowledge. But, surely, the Men of this wise and self-sufficient Generation strangely forget themselves when they allow us a Title to superior Knowledge. Ignorance, amongst other Crimes, has been charged to our Account. But to oblige the World, and do ourselves Justice, I shall admit, that Clergymen may not only be supposed to have, but that they actually have a more perfect, exact and critical Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, than other Men, But then, I hope, it will be owned with the same Ingenuity on the other Side, that no Man of an ordinary Capacity, and common Apprehension, can be supposed ignorant (except in some nice and involved Cases of Conscience which seldom happen) of his Duty to God, his Neighbour, and himself: Especially as these Things are so easily knowable by the Light of Nature, joined with the plain and intelligible Precepts of the Gospel, and by their being so frequently, and, I will add, so honestly explained to them by the Clergy of this Church. The Priest's Lips should preserve Knowledge; but Knowledge, conveyed

veyed and communicated to others, becomes their Knowledge, and they are as much accountable for the Use of it, as if it were of their own acquiring. Under so many Helps and Means as we enjoy, no Man, in Matters which necessarily concern his Salvation, can pretend Ignorance, nor therefore justly plead it, any more than we, in Excuse for his Faults and Misconduct. Let any Man make up an honest and impartial Account of his Life and Actions, and he will find the Number of his Sins, which he can fairly charge to direct Ignorance, to be very small. Neither is it reasonable to suppose, that Men who are so quick-sighted in marking our Conduct, and pointing out our Miscarriages, can be so wretchedly blind, as they pretend, in the Compass and Extent of their own Duty. In a Word, God has bestowed upon Men very different Capacities and Abilities, and in some Things may expect from them different Attainments proportionably; but upon all, who can be allowed to be reasonable Creatures, he has bestowed Capacity enough to know him, and be convinced, that it is their Duty, as Christians, to depart from Iniquity, to make their Calling and Election sure, and to work out their own Salvation with Fear and Trembling. So far my Subject led me to consider, and so far,

I am persuaded, my Arguments are conclusive.

NEITHER can any Christian plead, that he is less able than we to perform his Duty. *For without God we can do nothing; it is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good Pleasure:* In all Cases his preventing and assisting Grace is sufficient for us; and in all Cases without it, we are less than nothing. Now this Grace, or a Right to it, as far as the Purposes of a good Life are concerned, is allowed to be conveyed in Baptism, of which all are Partakers: And in all particular Exigencies it ought to be called for, and may be obtained by diligent Prayer. So that, in this Respect also, every Christian must needs lie, as he hath or may have the same Assistances, under the same Obligations.

If our greater Obligations arise not from these Things; from whence else? From some special Vows and Promises, it may be said, which we take upon ourselves. And it cannot be denied, that, as Clergymen, we do engage ourselves to some particular Duties by solemn Promises, which may be found in the admirable Offices of ordering Bishops, Priests and Deacons. But then it seems highly reasonable and necessary to distinguish between Duties which are common to all Christians, and Duties belonging to a particular

ticular Station in the Church. We solemnly promise to be diligent in studying the Word of God, and in preaching the same, or Doctrines agreeable thereto; to be diligent in Prayer and reading the Holy Scriptures, to banish all Error and strange Doctrine out of our respective Cures; to advise and exhort publickly and privately the Sick and the Sound; to fashion our Lives and Families after the Laws of Christ, and to promote Peace and Love among Men. This is an Abridgment of our Duty, as far as it needs here to be taken notice of. In which, I think, it is easy to observe, tho' Promises of this Nature are very properly and wisely demanded of us, that there are some Particulars in them obligatory upon all Christians. For Instance, the Care of that much-neglected Duty, Family-Religion, and of making and preserving Peace among themselves. He must be a strange Christian, whether he formally promises these Things or not, that can think himself not bound strictly to observe them. As to the other Particulars, I freely own, we are under stricter Ties, and that the Maintenance allotted us was designed, amongst other Reasons, for this very Purpose, that, being freed from the secular Cares and Business of Life, we might be enabled to give an uninterrupted Attendance upon these Duties. But what then?

then? Is it less true, that all these particular Duties of our Station do imply, and suppose a reciprocal and correspondent Set of Duties, equally obligatory upon all Christians? because our Order was not instituted for the Service of ourselves only, but for the Benefit and Edification of Christians in general. We are supposed, except we will revert to the Errors of Popery, not to go alone, but to be attended in all the Works of our publick Ministry. If we wait at the Lord's Table, ready to dispense the Sacramental Bread and Wine, can Christians excuse themselves from receiving it? If we are obliged diligently and constantly to study the Holy Scriptures, that out of them we may in publick preach sound Doctrine, and, like skilful Workmen, that need not be ashamed, rightly divide the Word of Truth; is it not the Duty of our respective Flocks diligently to hearken and obey? Does not publick Prayer and publick Teaching suppose Christians to be gathered together, constantly and seriously, at appointed Times, to resort to the Places sacred to God's Worship, to bring there, Ears willing and attentive, Hearts flexible and well-disposed, free from worldly Cares and vicious Prejudices? If our Lights should shine before Men, and we are bound to be Patterns of good Works, why is this so strictly enjoined us, and so greatly

greatly expected from us, if this be not the Reason, that others may trace and pursue our Footsteps, and so take heed to their own Ways that they halt not? *Be ye Followers of me as I am of Christ*, it should be remembered, is an Apostolical Precept. This Way of arguing may be extended with equal Force to the Duties of attending Sickbeds, and of administering private Counsel and Advice, and, indeed, to all the Branches of the pastoral Charge: And so strongly, that Christians must either acknowledge themselves to be under Obligations to certain Services, and to acquire certain Habits and Dispositions of Mind and Affection, necessary to make our Labours in the World effectual, or they must hold our Office and Function to be an idle and useless Appointment. Many Men, indeed, have the Face to say so; and they speak in Character. For those who call the Master of the House *Beelzebub*, cannot but abuse and despise the Servants of his Household. But no Christian, I am sure, who will abide by his own Principles, can pretend to support or defend such Sentiments. On the contrary, if he sincerely wishes well to himself, and the Religion he professes, he will esteem it his Duty to go Hand in Hand with us in the several Branches of our Function. Small, for ever small, will be the Advances
of

of Christianity in the World, while Men account us bound by all the Ties of Duty and Conscience to wait upon all the Ordinances of Religion, and themselves at Liberty to neglect or attend them at their Discretion, and to make, as it is shamefully true, any frivolous Pretence an Excuse for so doing. Wisely and prudently do our temporal and spiritual Governors exact from Men, who are to fill publick Offices, solemn Oaths and Promises; but the Number of Duties, incumbent on any Man, will not, I imagine, upon a fair Calculation, be found very unequal; neither will our several Obligations, where the Reason of Things and plain Precepts intervene, appear less to Men of honest Minds and good Intentions.

ANOTHER Thing I would beg Leave to mention under this Head is, that if Clergymen sometimes fail in the Discharge of their Duty, they are as much entitled to Compassion and Forgiveness from the World as other Men. And this, indeed, is a necessary Consequence of what has been already advanced. For if our Obligations to Duty, in most Cases at least, are nearly equal, and our Assistances and Helps the same, what can any Christian plead for himself, that will not be as reasonable, and ought to be as available in our Case? Are we not encumbered

cumbered with Flesh and Blood, as well as other Men? Do not we, as they, find a Law in our Members warring against the Law of our Minds? Is not the Devil, and all the Power of the Enemy, as active and vigilant to tempt and betray us? And therefore, in this Struggle, if we, like others, are sometimes worsted, is it any Miracle? Surely, common Reason and common Justice are here on our Side. For how hard and unequal is our Fate, who are made of the same Dust, agitated and assaulted by the same Passions, if every unhappy Failing in us is to leave an indelible Impression upon our Characters, and at the same Time be tenderly and mercifully overlooked in other Men! I know the cruel and unchristian Delight which Men take in publishing and magnifying each others Faults; but Ill-nature usually displays her whole Art in blazoning ours. And I must add, that this Temper is most observable in those of our own Communion. I presume, I may venture to say, without Offence, that the Pastors of other Churches are Men, and encompassed with Infirmities, and may sometimes possibly fall. But seldom are such Incidents published to the World. While we are loud in our Censures, and seem to relieve ourselves of a Burden by venting them, the Piety or Prudence of

D

others

others disposes them to draw a Veil over the Vices and Follies of their Teachers, and to go backwards and cover their Nakedness.

THEY, who are real Friends to the Church of *England*, should condescend in this Case to be taught by her Enemies, and learn to be more tender of the Characters of her Ministers. No Man, Priest or Layman, in any Habit of any Colour, can live in a continued wicked Course, but he deserves highly to be detested by God and the World. But it will appear sometimes in all Men, that they are frail and mortal; and if the fatal Bias, hung upon human Nature, should, in some unguarded Moments, draw us aside from the Path of Duty, let not this at once destroy our whole Credit, ruin the Authority of our Doctrines, and the whole Use and Benefit of our Ministry. However, whether I can prevail so far or not, let no Man, with great Injustice and Partiality, judge us by a Rule to which he will not submit the Trial and Examination of his own Life and Actions.

AND, *lastly*, before I quit this Subject, I would beg to be heard in a few Words, with all possible Submission, by the mighty Men of Reason of this Age; by those who maintain the Doctrines of Christianity to be incredible, and the whole System of it useless. In these Mens Eyes a Christian
Priest

Priest must needs be a despicable Character; no Wonder therefore if they buffet our Reputations and magnify our Miscarriages with a peculiar Malice. Will these Men of Reason hear Reason and abide by it? If they will, I would advise them to consider what a weighty Task even natural Religion, by their own Confession, lays upon them. Every moral Duty is a Branch of the Religion of Nature: Do they live uniformly and constantly in the Practice of it? If they do not, what can they plead but human Infirmary, and such sort of Excuses as they will not admit in us. If they say God has made our Duty impracticable without supernatural Assistances, why then do they think it unreasonable that God should afford them; and why make a Jest of christian Grace, offered and conveyed in and thro' the Gospel? If they hope that God, of his infinite Mercies, will pardon the Transgressions of his Creatures; why should it seem a Thing incredible with them, that God should declare so by his Son Jesus Christ, and specify the Terms and Conditions of that Pardon? But this is only an incidental Reflection, which might, however, deserve to be enlarged on, were it not beside my present Purpose. All I would now desire of them is, that they would compare

their own Lives with their own Rule; and, if they are in earnest, and have any Religion at all, learn and acknowledge, that Candour and Charity are due to Christian Priests as well as to other Men.

I HAVE now done, and hope that nothing advanced by me will give Offence to any good Man, or, impartially considered, not be found agreeable to sound Doctrine, and so have a Chance to please all. The Laity, surely, will not be offended. They know it is my Duty, upon this and all other Occasions, to speak boldly, to rebuke Vice, correct Error, to exhort and persuade Men, and enforce the Doctrines and Duties of Christianity. And for their own sakes, and the sake of that Master whom I serve, I could not but endeavour to prevent their being any longer misguided by such an unreasonable Prejudice, as to think Christianity to them only an indifferent Consideration, to be jested and played with, embraced or rejected, just as Humour, Inclination and Convenience invited and disposed them. No: The several Duties of it ought to be habitually before every Man's Eyes, and attend him in his wordly Business and Amusements; and he ought to be told, and acknowledge, that his Obligations to discharge them are indispensable, and never
ima-

imagine, that we only are concerned to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called.

My Brethren of the Clergy cannot, I hope, be offended. I am as ready, as the gravest and severest, to own the Duty and Necessity of watching every Step of our own Conduct; our Obligations to study and labour in the Holy Scriptures, to defend, protect, assist, persuade and admonish our respective Flocks. I have endeavour'd only to state comparatively our Obligations to Holiness of Life with those of other Men, and to bespeak the Candour and Justice of a prejudiced World in our Favour, that in the same Circumstances we may be intitled to the same christian and good-natur'd Allowances which they claim themselves.

IN a Word, the Cause of Religion is not the Cause of us only, but of the good Magistrate, of all who fill high Stations, and of every one who nameth the Name of Christ, and professeth himself to be his Disciple. And if the real Friends of it, in every Station of Life, would, instead of disputing upon whom lie the greatest Obligations, study, as far as their Obligations reach, whether equal or unequal, to adorn and protect it, its Progress thro' the Land would be quick and irresistible: Infidelity
would

would sculk away and hide herself in Dark-
ness, and not dare to shew her impudent
Forehead in broad Day-light; and our
Vices and Errors would soon and speedily
give Way to Truth and Virtue. Such
would be the natural and unavoidable Effect
of a general Conspiracy in it, but this is
too much to be hoped for as long as this
great Work is left in our Hands only. For
I must say it, there are Men in the World
who can more effectually accomplish a Re-
formation of Manners than we. There
are those, whose Influence and Example
extends further, who have it in their Power,
by a Nod and a Look, to dash Vice out of
Countenance, and to bring Virtue into
Fashion and Esteem; whilst our Influence
is necessarily confined to act within a nar-
rower Sphere. For notwithstanding the
senseless Clamour, which has been propa-
gated from Age to Age, of the Power and
Riches of the Clergy, the Figure most of
us are able to make in the World is mean
and low in Comparison with that of others.
And while Men are governed by outward
Appearances, as they have hitherto been,
our Influence must be in Proportion smaller,
and the Wisdom of such poor Men will
always be despised.

BUT let us, my Brethren, endeavour to
supply our Deficiencies in outward Advan-
tages,

tages, by acquiring inward and spiritual Ornaments, that they who seek Occasion to speak Evil of us, may daily find less and less Occasion to do it. I have not designed, in this Discourse, to lessen one Obligation on our Parts to Religion, but to settle the true Measure of every Christian's Duty in this common Cause, in which there is no such great Disproportion as the World usually imagines. While we alone stand up, I fear, the Plague of Vice and Infidelity will never be stayed. But let not this discourage us. Let us deserve Success, if we cannot command it. If, as some say, and seem delighted to say, our Obligations are double, and our Damnation, if we discharge them not, is two-fold: Let us, however, be permitted to recal this comfortable Reflection on the other Hand, that our Reward, if we do discharge them, must, for the very same Reasons, be allowed to excel, and to be exceeding great in the Kingdom of Heaven. And God grant, for the sake of other Men, and for our own sakes, that they (as the Apostle often exhorts Christians) may rather be disposed to pray for the Ministers of Christ than to asperse them, and not so busily to watch our Steps as to be entirely heedless of their own Goings: Knowing, that whatever Inequalities or Differences there
may

may be in our several Obligations to Religion at present, or in our future Allotments, it will be more tolerable in the Day of Judgment for those who know not God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, than for any of us who name his Name, and depart not from Iniquity.

Now to God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all Might, Praise and Adoration for ever, Amen.

F I N I S.
